

DAILY INTERLAKE

KALISPELL, MT 59904

MON.-FRI., 14, 291 SUN., 16, 136

FEB 11 2002

SUPERIOR CLIPPING SERVICE

GLENDALE, MT 406-363-6612

⁴⁰
Programs proposed at Lincoln campus**By MATTHEW BUNK**
Special to the Inter Lake

LIBBY — Plans to develop more vocational programs at the Lincoln County Campus might include training for asbestos removal, campus service region board members said at a January monthly meeting.

Also discussed was the feasibility of offering a building trades program, in which students would construct a house for college credit.

"Vocational education is what we need here," board member Steve Garrett said. "That's how people will get jobs."

Future asbestos abatement activities in the Libby area directed by the Environmental Protection Agency will translate into more jobs for area residents if the training is implemented, Garrett said. What exactly the cleanup effort will focus on, either designated sites or the removal of asbestos from each individual home with vermiculite insulation, is still in question.

If Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response training, more commonly known as "Hazwhopper," is not provided on a

large scale locally, EPA contracting firms most likely will look elsewhere for qualified personnel, he warned.

Although Hazwhopper training is similar to Hazardous Materials, or Haz-Mat, training, the certification requirements are not as rigid.

Members of the board were encouraged by an indication from Gov. Judy Martz during a December public meeting to announce Libby's Superfund listing, that local job seekers should be employed to assist in the asbestos abatement.

Likewise, the EPA also has encouraged the Lincoln County Campus to implement the Hazwhopper program so residents could have an opportunity to apply for employment in that field.

But a recent influx of out-of-towners looking for EPA-contracted employment could jeopardize job openings for longtime Libby residents, said County Commissioner Rita Windom.

"I'm concerned people here will get aced out by other people just moving here," she said, citing a substantial increase in requested aid at the Libby Food Pantry by people looking for EPA jobs.

First things first, though, board member Ardell Filler said.

"We have to get these people trained or else it won't matter," he pointed out. "That's what I'm concerned about. Let's get them trained."

The first step in the process will be finding out how much it would cost to train an instructor and where that type of training is offered, campus Interim Director George Gerard said. The college then would need to come up with the funds to set the program in motion, a daunting task to the budget-crunched branch college.

The college runs into similar financial dilemmas concerning the building trades program. Applying for local grants and partnering with the Troy and Libby school districts in a dual-credit, dual-fund program are options the board discussed.

Initial costs to fund the building trades program, including an additional instructor salary, could be in the \$40,000 range, Gerard estimated. Once a house had been built and sold, the program would start to cover its own financial needs.

"If we had reserve funds to get the programs started, they would eventually pay for themselves," Gerard said. "It's just a matter of getting them going."